



QIAN ZHONGSHU (1910-1998) AND WORLD LITERATURE

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In twentieth-century China, Qian Zhongshu is probably the most learned scholar with a wide scope of knowledge of traditional Chinese literature and culture on the one hand, and on the other, a familiarity with, and deep understanding of, the Western tradition that few Chinese scholars could match. "*Sa connaissance de la littérature chinoise, du patrimoine occidental, de la littérature universelle, est prodigieuse*," as Pierre Rickmans observed in as early as 1983, "*Qian Zhongshu n'a pas son pareil aujourd'hui en Chine et même dans le monde*."[1] In 1985, Qian was elected an honorary member of the Modern Language Association of America, together with such stellar figures as Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, Gérard Genette, Wolfgang Iser, and Robert Weimann. Despite such high prestige, however, Qian Zhongshu remains largely unknown in the West, particularly in comparison with the other MLA honorary members elected in the same year as listed above. In the West, as I wrote elsewhere, "so far there has been very little critical assessment of Qian's scholarship to give it the credit and appreciation it deserves. Now that we are embracing a truly global concept of world literature beyond the familiar grounds of the European tradition, we should know what a great comparatist and humanist Qian Zhongshu was and how exemplary and significant his works are for anyone interested in world literature and East-West comparative studies."[2] It is the purpose of this essay not only to introduce Qian Zhongshu as a distinguished comparatist and humanist to a wider audience outside China, but also to argue for the importance of a truly global perspective in the study of world literature.

More than thirty years ago, in early June 1980, the eminent Dutch scholar and comparatist Douwe Fokkema visited Qian Zhongshu in his home at Sanlihe in Beijing, and at his request, I accompanied him and thus had the opportunity to meet Mr. Qian for the first time. During the visit, their con-

1. Pierre Rickmans, "Fou de chinois," *Le Monde*, June 10, 1983, p. 15.
2. Zhang Longxi, "Qian Zhongshu as Comparatist," in Theo D'haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 81.

versation touched upon many subjects in the comparative study of literatures and cultures East and West, and at one point Fokkema praised Qian for making great contributions to comparative literature through his numerous discoveries of comparables between Chinese and European traditions in his many publications. Mr. Qian, however, politely declined the high compliment. "What I did is not comparative literature at all," he said with a smile, "but mere eclecticism." I was amazed by this very modest gesture, so when I wrote to him after that visit, I expressed my deep respect for his unassuming modesty and humility. In his almost immediate reply, which marked the first of several dozens of letters Qian Zhongshu wrote to me over the years, he disclosed that what he had said was, quite characteristically, more complicated than what the surface meaning might suggest. The word "eclecticism" had become almost a "dirty word" since the nineteenth century, he explained, so "syncretism" came to be a preferred term in modern usage. Instead of following the current usage, however, he chose to use the term in its earlier sense. "Eclectic," says Mr. Qian, "is my word that sounds 'modest' but in fact shows my proud nonconformity; so I spoke of the definition given in the French Encyclopedia, actually given by Voltaire and Diderot, that is, a bold, independent spirit that 'refuses to be bound by any theoretical system, but dares to think by itself (*ose penser par lui-même*) in assimilating the best of all the different schools of thought.'"[3] In a way that best describes Qian Zhongshu the man and the scholar, for his approach to knowledge is to work through all the rich textual materials and traditions by himself, and his principle in life as well as in scholarship is to think independently and critically, without subjecting oneself to the external pressure of authorities against one's own conviction and critical understanding. He took pride in being an "eclectic" so defined because he would rather go against the grains, so to speak, by refusing to accept blindly the authority of any particular "theoretical system." He was fully aware of the trend in contemporary time for such systems to dominate the mind by an orthodoxy, be it political, ideological, intellectual, or otherwise, which denies the critical mind its independence, its "eclectic" gathering of the best of human thinking and knowledge regardless of its provenance or affiliation. Such a nonconformist attitude and independent spirit may have particular relevance and significance in China in his time, but they are just as valuable to us today in what we do as scholars in our intellectual endeavors and as citizens in our lives.

Born in an intellectual family in Wuxi near Shanghai in 1910, Qian Zhongshu (1910 – 1998) had a solid education in classical Chinese at home. His father, Qian Jibo, was a well-known professor of Chinese, "a Confucian scholar with strict self-discipline, who had a significant influence on Qian Zhongshu."[4] The early twentieth century was a time of rapid and tremendous

3. Personal correspondence dated June 11, 1980. See Zhang Longxi, *Zouchu wenhua de fengbi quan* [*Out of the Cultural Ghetto*] (Beijing: Sanlian, 2004), pp. 223-24.
4. Tang Yan, *Qian Zhongshu: Minguo diyi caizi* [*Ch'ien Chung-shu: Oppressed Genius*] (Taipei: Taipei Times, 2001), p. 28.

changes in China. After humiliating defeat in the Opium Wars and many unequal treaties in the 19th century, the last imperial dynasty was overthrown, the traditional Sinocentric notion that China stood at the center of "all under heaven" surrounded by less cultured barbarians quickly collapsed and was replaced by a brand-new concept of a world of many nations. In that "forest of nations," China was weak under the threat of Western powers, and most Chinese intellectuals were trying their best to look for ways to rejuvenate China. Translation of Western works became crucial in their search for new knowledge and power. Yan Fu (1854-1921), who studied at the Royal Navy College in Greenwich, England, in the late 1870s, became most influential for his translation of major works of European political and social thought, such as Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, and several others. In the area of literature, translations of European and American novels by the ingenious Lin Shu (1852 – 1924) enjoyed a sweeping popularity, even though Lin himself did not know any foreign language. Working with collaborators knowledgeable in the originals, he was nonetheless successful in transforming what must have been rough oral renditions into graceful written Chinese with the elegance of a classical style. At a time when Chinese mandarins and bureaucrats had very little knowledge about the West, Lin Shu's translations of Western novels offered Chinese readers an enchanting world of different characters with different customs in very different social environments.

As a schoolboy, Qian Zhongshu had a passion for novels and stories. He was already familiar with traditional Chinese novels of historical adventures and heroic deeds, but reading Lin Shu's translation of Western novels was quite an exhilarating experience, which he described many years later as his "great discovery at the age of eleven or twelve" that led him to a completely new world outside that of the familiar traditional Chinese literature. In reading Lin's translations, he reminisces, "I came to know that Western novels could be so fascinating! I was never tired of reading Rider Haggard, Dickens, Washington Irving, Scott, and Swift time and again. If I had any conscious motivations for learning English at the time, one of them was that one day I could indulge myself in reading all the adventure stories by Haggard and other writers."[5] He commented on the effect of literary translation that was almost ironically self-defeating. "Translation is meant to save people the trouble of learning foreign languages and reading the originals," says Qian, "but all of a sudden it may change to tempt some to learn foreign languages and read works in the original. It may stir their curiosity and make them long for the original, as if whetting their appetite with a tasty morsel without satisfying their hunger and craving." Goethe in his *Maximen und Reflexionen*, he goes on to add, "compared translators rather impolitely to lowly and pushy matchmakers (*Übersetzer sind als geschäftige Kuppler anzusehen*)," who "show a half-concealed beauty (*eine halbverschleierte Schöne*) of the original,

5. Qian Zhongshu, "Lin Shu's Translation," in *Qi zhui ji* [*Collection of Seven Essays*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1985), p. 70.

leaving readers desperate to see the beauty in their fevered imagination."[6] Good translations, in other words, may lead some readers to abandon translation for the original work. Translation, says Qian, may "entice" readers to the original, and that was what Lin Shu's translation did to him.

The early twentieth century was a time when the traditional and the new, classical Chinese learning and modern Western education became all available in China, so it was possible for that generation of scholars, or at least some lucky ones growing up in such an environment, to have both classical training and Western-style modern education. Qian Zhongshu was certainly one of those who benefitted tremendously from such available opportunities, for after home schooling in classical Chinese, he went to a secondary school in Suzhou, established by American Episcopal missionaries with a particular emphasis on English. "In Chinese, he was rigorously disciplined by his father and read many ancient books," as one of his biographers remarks, "in English, because of his own interest and also because his school was managed by Christian missionaries, he read many Western books in the original; thus he made rapid progress in both Chinese and English, which laid a very good foundation for his further development."[7] When he reached the age for college, Qian Zhongshu was admitted to one of China's best, Tsinghua University, and quickly became an outstanding student with some kind of a legendary aura around him. He actually failed the entrance exam in mathematics, but he was given special permission to matriculate by the president of the university on the strength of his extraordinarily good scores in both Chinese and English; when he arrived, therefore, "he already had a reputation as a talented one at Tsinghua."[8] Wu Mi, a famous scholar and at the time Dean of the College of Arts at Tsinghua, once put Qian Zhongshu, an undergraduate student, together with Chen Yinke, a renowned professor, and compared them to "dragons among humans," while seeing all the rest, including himself, as "just average fellows."[9] Qian Zhongshu thus already stood out as a learned scholar even when he was a young college student. After Tsinghua, he went to Oxford for two years and received a B. Litt. degree in 1937 with a thesis on "China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth Centuries"; and from Oxford he moved on to Paris and studied at the Sorbonne for another year.

That was a most difficult time in twentieth-century history. Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan formed the alliance of the Axis, and Japan started a full-scale war with China in 1937. The terrible situation in China made it impossible for Qian to stay in Europe, and he left Paris for home in September 1938. As Peking, Shanghai and much of the northern territories and the Chinese eastern coast had fallen under Japanese occupation, Qian went to Kunming to join the National Southwestern Associated University,

6. *Ibid.*, p. 68-69.
7. Tang Yan, *Qian Zhongshu*, p. 38-39.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

which was formed by merging Peking University, Tsinghua University and Nankai University during the Sino-Japanese war. Like all other Chinese intellectuals of his generation, Qian lived in a time of uncertainties and turmoil, and there was hardly a quiet and peaceful place for his scholarly pursuits during the war against Japan and then the civil war between the Kuomingtang and the Communists. And yet, Qian Zhongshu managed to teach in several universities and started to publish his influential works. A collection of essays, *Written on the Margins of Life*, came out in 1941, followed by *Men, Beasts, and Ghosts*, a collection of short stories, in 1946. *Fortress Besieged*, his only novel, appeared in 1947, which is considered by many as the finest modern Chinese fiction, highly praised "for its delightful portrayal of contemporary manners, its comic exuberance, and its tragic insight," as C. T. Hsia remarks.[10]

Unlike his essays and stories written in the modern vernacular, a volume of literary criticism written in the classical language, *Tan yi lu* or *Discourses on the Art of Literature*, came out in 1948. This book is exemplary of Qian Zhongshu's scholarship that draws on incredibly rich textual sources in Chinese and European languages for comparisons, intertextual connections, and mutual illuminations. Though this is a volume of literary appreciation, Qian writes in the Preface, "it is in fact a book produced in sorrow and anxieties," for he was attending to his parents and taking care of his family during a time of war, and he described his situation "as precarious as swallows building their nest on a hanging curtain, or as ants gathering together on a withered locus tree." In that book, he continues to say, he often takes from works of the West as reference points in discussing Chinese works, and he justifies his comparative methodology by alluding to an old saying that "from the eastern sea to the western sea, the minds and principles are the same; in the teachings of the south and the north, the way and the means are not separate."[11] That saying comes from a Confucian thinker Lu Xiangshan (1139–1192) of the Song dynasty, who famously said that "there are sages emerging from the eastern sea with the same mind and principles; and there are sages emerging from the western sea with the same mind and principles."[12] Since the late 16th century, when Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and the other Jesuit missionaries came to China and started the intellectual contacts between China and Europe, this saying had often been used to legitimize the mutual understanding and interaction between the "eastern sea" and the "western sea." By alluding to Lu Xiangshan's saying, Qian Zhongshu not only positions himself in a native intellectual tradition that justifies the assimilation of ideas from the West, but also lays down the grounds for his

10. C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 434.
11. Qian Zhongshu, Preface to *Tan yi lu* [*Discourses on the Art of Literature*], expanded ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1984), p. 1.
12. Lu Xiangshan, *Lu Xiangshan quanji* [*Lu Xiangshan's Complete Works*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1992), p. 317.

effort always to combine Chinese and Western literary works and philosophical ideas for better understanding and mutual illumination.

As a critical work, the *Discourses* offers insightful discussions of classical Chinese poetry, and typical of Qian's work, those discussions are not just limited in the classical tradition of Chinese commentaries, but always reach out to the West by quoting works in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, or Latin. The wide range of reference is not just an extraordinary display of the author's knowledge and erudition, but opens new ways to look at old texts or old ideas. For example, a conventional view of Chinese literary history often relates a particular genre to a particular dynasty; thus, poetry is supposed to reach its peak during the Tang, *ci* or lyric poetry emerged in the Song, followed by the rise of drama in the Yuan and Ming, and novels in the Ming and Qing dynasties. By presenting textual evidence of copious quotations, Qian Zhongshu disproves such a simplistic view of complex historical continuities and transformations, and proposes his own view that "the way literature evolves and develops is nothing but taking in what was not literary to be literary, and taking what was prosaic to be poetic. What used to be considered not suitable for literature is admitted as stuff for literature, and what used to be considered vulgar expressions are taken to be materials for the weaving of an elegant text."[13] The great Tang writer Han Yu (768-824) provides a convincing example, for he was particularly noted for turning phrases fit for prose into innovative poetic expressions. In his discussion of Han Yu's use of prosaic expressions in poetry, Qian opens the question up to a more general discussion of world literature. He points out the same tendency in William Wordsworth, who in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* dismissed "poetic diction" in favor of ordinary language; in Victor Hugo, who in his preface to *Les Orientales* argued that anything can be a suitable literary subject (*Tout est sujet*); and in Friedrich Schlegel, who in *Athenäumfragmente*, no. 116, considered poetry as the culmination of all forms, "a progressive universal poetry (*eine progressive Universalpoesie*)." Then, as a rule in all literary histories, Qian reminds us with Victor Schklovsky that "New forms are simply canonization of inferior genres."[14] By putting Han Yu in the company of Wordsworth, Hugo, and Schlegel and by referring to Schklovsky's theoretical argument, Qian Zhongshu makes it clear that the development of literary genres and the changing concept of literature is a process of constant expansion, the assimilation of elements of prose in poetry, and the integration of what was considered non-literary into the legitimate sphere of literature. Thus what is taken to be a particular feature, even a feature of a particular writer within the limits of Chinese literature, is now better understood as an exemplification of a general tendency in world literature, a rule in the unfolding of the history of literature.

It is worth noting that Qian Zhongshu cited Schklovsky in 1948, more than twenty years before Russian Formalism and Schklovsky became well-known

13. Qian Zhongshu, *Tan yi lu* [*Discourses on the Art of Literature*], p. 29-30.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 34-35.

among Western literary scholars. That shows how well read he was and what an acute sense he had to anticipate the new and important in the study of literature and critical theories. For the study of world literature, Qian's work is valuable for making connections between very different traditions on the basis of detailed textual evidence of comparable ideas and concrete expressions. For example, in commenting on a famous line by the Tang poet Li Ho (790-816), "My writing brush amends where nature amiss without heaven's work," Qian Zhongshu not only quotes classical Chinese writers on the idea of man's work as separate from nature and heaven, but also opens this up to a discussion of the relationship between nature and art in a much larger context. He observes that there are two main trends of thought on this issue. One puts emphasis on the imitation of nature, which in the West originated in Plato (*Republic*, 339-97; 595-607; *Laws*, 669-74, etc.), developed by Aristotle (*Poetics*, I:5, II:2, IV:9, V:1, VI:2-6, etc.), reiterated by Cicero (*Orator*, II-III), became predominant from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and remains influential even today. Shakespeare's well-known phrase sums it all up when Hamlet claims that the end of art is "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature" (*Hamlet*, III.ii.22). In Chinese poetry, Han Yu's line, "words become marvelous, seeing the shape of heaven," articulates a similar idea. "This school of thought maintains," says Qian, "that nature, though containing all beauties, is not perfect and completely beautiful, and so the poet must adopt a selective imitation in his work."[15] The other school of thought, he continues, puts emphasis on human creativity above nature, and in the West it first appeared in Dio Chrysostom (*Oratio*, XII: "De dei cogitatione"), expounded by Plotinus (*Enneads*, I.vi), and understood by various writers from Francis Bacon (*Advancement of Learning*, Bk. II) to the brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt (*Journal*, jeudi jan. 1861; 8 juin 1862; 3 juillet 1865), Charles Baudelaire (Curiosités esthétiques: "Salon de 1859"), and James McNeill Whistler (*Ten O'clock*). Qian quoted Dante as representing the Western view: "*Ma la natura la dà sempra scema,/ similemente operando all'artista/ c'ha l'abito dell'arte e man che trema*" (*Paradiso*, XIII, 76-8). In this context, Li Ho's line, "My writing brush amends where nature amiss without heaven's work," becomes extremely significant as an epitome of the idea of artistic creativity. "This school of thought," says Qian, "not only regards beauty created in art far superior to nature, but deems nature as containing no beauty, only raw materials to be made into beautiful things through artistic work and transformation. That is why nature needs to be 'amended' by the artist 'without heaven's work.' But in my view," Qian continues, "these two schools of thought, though seemingly opposite, are in fact complementary to one another; they look different, but they share the same mind." Again, Shakespeare provides a suitable expression to sum up the relationship: "This is an art / Which does mend nature, change it rather, but / That art itself is Nature" (*The Winter's Tale*, IV.iv.95). Qian praises Shakespeare for his

15. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

"completely persuasive and marvelous words."[16] The intertextual weaving of Chinese and European sources is typical of Qian's writing, which effectively presents the point he is making in a convincing manner, for it is always richly illustrated by concrete examples and buttressed by textual evidence from several traditions. What is often discussed within limits of Chinese literature is thus brought to a much wider scope, in which the Chinese text engages in a cross-cultural dialogue with texts of many other traditions, and a particular idea or insight becomes more relevant and revealing in the larger context of world literature.

The novel *Fortress Besieged* (1947) and the critical volume *Discourses* (1948) mark an important point of Qian's career as he was reaching the prime of his creativity as a writer and critic, but that was also the time when the political situation in China underwent tremendous changes and the intellectual milieu quickly deteriorated. From the early 1950s till the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s, intellectuals in China were constantly subjected to ideological control and even persecution in the numerous political campaigns, in which many writers and scholars were condemned as "rightists," lost their freedom or their voice, as they were intimidated into coercive silence. For example, Shen Congwen (1902-1988), one of the best and most prolific writers in modern China, who had published dozens of novels and short stories and cut a very prominent figure from the 1920s to the 1940s, completely stopped his creative writing and never published a single work of fiction after 1949. Likewise Qian Zhongshu never wrote the second novel he had planned and kept a very low profile. In more than 30 years, as he told me in a private communication, "of all the planned works, not one out of ten was completed."[17] The condition in Mao's China was certainly not propitious for literary creativity or critical thinking, and other than a selection of Song dynasty poetry, Qian hardly published anything in those years. The *Selection of Song Dynasty Poetry with Annotations* (1958), however, is an excellent piece of work. Given the political milieu at the time of its compilation and publication, the selection of poems could not have deviated much from the permissible lines of literary orthodoxy with its emphasis on "critical realism" in dealing with traditional literature, but Qian's annotations show his profound understanding of the entire tradition of classical Chinese poetry, and his introduction constitutes a wonderful essay that subtly challenges the critical orthodoxy of the time. The introduction begins with a brief discussion of the history of the Song dynasty as background of much of its poetic creation, which seems to endorse the Marxist doctrine of literature as a mirror reflection of its social and historical conditions, but Qian immediately moves away from such a mechanic reflection theory. "A work of literature is produced in the author's historical milieu and takes root in the reality in which he lives," says Qian, "but the ways in which it

16. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
17. Personal correspondence dated June 11, 1980. See Zhang Longxi, *Zouchu wenhua de fengbi quan* [*Out of the Cultural Ghetto*], p. 223.

reflects the milieu and gives expression to the reality can be multifarious and varied."[18] He goes on to argue that poetry may realistically describe the social condition of a time, but realism cannot be the sole criterion to judge the value of poetry. He thus dismisses the idea of "history in verse" and considers it a "prejudice," for "poetry is a living being with flesh and blood; history may well be its bone structure, but to judge the value of a poem by solely considering whether its content can be verified in historical records would be as if the beauty of a human body created by a painter or a sculptor is to be testified through an X-ray examination." He then differentiates poetry from history by identifying their different functions and efficacies, putting poetry eventually above history:

> The reality in literary creation is not equivalent to the factuality in historical scholarship; therefore it is just as inappropriate to mechanically use evidential scholarship to test the reality of a literary work, as to naively ask literary works to provide historical facts. Historical evidential scholarship only focuses on the appearance of things, which constitutes its virtue of self-discipline, otherwise it loses its precision and identity, and turns into something prone to overreach and exaggerate, and to make far-fetched connections. A literary work, on the other hand, may probe into the hidden essence of things and bring out the protagonist's unexpressed psychological intricacies, otherwise it would have failed to fulfill its task as an art work and abdicated its responsibilities and prerogative to create. Evidential scholarship only ascertains what has happened, but art can imagine what should have happened and conjecture why it has so happened. In that sense, we may say that poetry, fiction, and drama are superior to history.[19]

The argument is of course unmistakably Aristotelian; in fact Qian Zhongshu refers to Aristotle's *Poetics* in a footnote, supported by textual evidence drawn from Chinese literature and history. The historical book *Zuo zhuan*, says Qian, "has records of Chu Ni's monologue before he committed suicide, which many readers since ancient times have found hard to believe, or at least unclear on the part of the historian, because, since it was a monologue, 'who heard it and who recounted it?' (See Li Yuandu, 'On Chu Ni,' in vol. 1 of *Writings from the Tianyue Mountain Studio*). But about 'the lovers' whispers in a quiet midnight' as described in the *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, no one seems to have asked dull-wittedly, 'who heard it and who recounted it?' Nor has anyone played the killjoy to accuse the 'Taoist from Linqiong' of lying."[20] Both the historical book *Zuo zhuan* and the *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, a famous poem by Bo Juyi (772-846) of the Tang dynasty, contain implausible records of private speech that no one could have overheard, but the poet's description has never been blamed for its improbability, whereas careful

18. Qian Zhongshu, *Song shi xuan zhu* [*Selection of Song Dynasty Poetry with Annotations*] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1958), p. 3.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 4-5.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

readers have questioned the veracity of *Zuo zhuan* as historical records. This clear distinction among Chinese readers in their reactions toward historical narrative and poetic imagination effectively points to the distinction of the two kinds of discourse, thus consolidating the view Aristotle articulated in *Poetics* and also Qian's oblique critique of the Maoist doctrine of literature as a mechanical copying or reflection of reality.

The death of Mao and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 marked the turning point of China's destiny as well as the fate of millions and millions of Chinese. In 1979, *Guan zhui bian* or *Limited Views*, Qian Zhongshu's *magnum opus* written under difficult conditions during the Cultural Revolution, came out from the prestigious publisher Zhonghua shuju, and won immediate acclaim, and an expanded second edition was published in 1986. His novel, *Fortress Besieged*, was republished in 1980 and adapted for a popular television serial in 1990, which made Qian Zhongshu a household name in China far beyond intellectual circles. The second and much enlarged edition of *Discourses on the Art of Literature* was published in 1984, and *Qi zhui ji* or the *Collection of Seven Essays* came out in 1985, the same year when he was elected an honorary member of the MLA. Qian Zhongshu was "rediscovered" and a trend of "Qian studies" started in earnest among some Chinese scholars and students. Forty years after his return to China from Europe, he was allowed to join Chinese delegations and visited America (1979) and Japan (1980), and was made a Deputy President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 1982. In a letter he wrote to me at the time, he said he "never dreamed of" being placed in such an office, which he described in a self-mocking tone by deliberately misquoting Shakespeare (*Twelfth Night*, II.v.145): "Some are born mandarins, some become mandarins, some have mandarinate thrust upon them."[21] Even for his election to the MLA honorary membership, he told me that he had no choice but to accept because "the Academy ordered me to accept; having to wear that mandarin hat on my head and thus lost the autonomy of my body, I am not able to emulate what Valéry said in praise of Mallarmé that '*Pauvre et sans honneurs, la nudité de sa condition avilissait tous les avantages des autres*.'"[22] He knew so deeply the ways of the world and had such cool-minded observations of men's vanity and folly that he could not be tempted by fame or the title of some revered office. He refused to be lionized and turned down invitations to interviews or television appearances. He wanted to be left alone to do his work, for the five volumes of the *Limited Views* are only part of a much larger work he had planned. Unfortunately, he never had time enough to bring his planned work to completion, and he passed away on December 19, 1998, leaving behind a great volume of unfinished manuscripts and notes, which were later published in their original, unedited form as facsimile reproductions.

21. Personal correspondence dated June 28, 1982. See Zhang Longxi, *Zouchu wenhua de fengbi quan* [*Out of the Cultural Ghetto*], p. 231.
22. Personal correspondence dated May 3, 1982. See Zhang Longxi, *Zouchu wenhua de fengbi quan* [*Out of the Cultural Ghetto*], p. 232.

Written in classical Chinese like his earlier work *Discourses on the Art of Literature*, *Guan zhui bian* or *Limited Views* as Qian Zhongshu's most major work of scholarship covers much more than just literature. It is an ambitious work of commentary on some of the most important ancient Chinese books, and again like the earlier *Discourses*, it always brings the Chinese text into intriguing dialogues with Western texts of various languages. It evinces the author's encyclopedic knowledge and offers an excellent model for Chinese-Western comparative studies. The very first entry, a commentary on the meaning of *yi* in the title of the great Chinese classic, *Yi jing* (*I Ching* or the *Book of Changes*), lays the ground for East-West comparative studies. Qian begins by quoting the Han dynasty commentator Zheng Xuan (127-200), who explained that "the word *yi* has one name but three meanings: first, 'easy,' second, 'change,' and third, 'no change.'" It is remarkable that of the three meanings, two are contradictory. Qian goes on to cite the examples of some other Chinese words, such as *shi* or poetry, *lun* as in *Lun yu* or the Confucian *Analects*, *wang* or king, and *ying* or response, and shows how all of these have different and sometimes contradictory meanings. Then, he turns to G. W. F. Hegel's ill-informed view of the Chinese:

> Hegel once denigrated our language and thought it unfit for philosophizing (*Wissenschaft der Logik*, Reclams "Universal-Bibliothek", I, 19); while he praised the German language as suitable for expressing the subtlety of metaphysical meanings, as exemplified by the word *Aufheben* that contains in one and the same word two contradictory meanings (*ein und desselbe Wort für zwei entgegengesetzte Bestimmungen*), which, he claimed, not even Latin has a word to match in depth and subtlety (*ibid.*, 124-25). We need not blame Hegel for his ignorance of the Chinese language; neither should we be surprised at his careless high-sounding argument based on such ignorance, for that is not uncommon with those learned master-savants; but as scholars we do feel it a shame that he has turned what is the same in minds and principles from the eastern sea to the western sea into the proverbial incomparable apples and oranges.[23]

The mention of "the eastern sea" and "the western sea" recalls what we have seen in the preface to the *Discourses*, where the phrase serves to legitimate the cross-cultural illumination of Chinese and Western traditions. The refutation of Hegel's denigration of Chinese is necessary for the entire project of East-West comparative studies in Qian's work, so the discussion of the bisemy of words with contradictory meanings in Chinese makes an important point that *Aufhebung* is not the only word that contains two opposite meanings. In fact, Stephen Ullmann pointed out long ago that there is "a special case of bisemy," where we find "*antonymous senses* attached to the same name," and his examples include such words as the Latin *sacer* and the French *sacré*, meaning both "sacred" and "accursed."[24] We realize that

23. Qian Zhongshu, *Guan zhui bian* [*Limited Views*], 2nd ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986), 5 vols. 1:1-2.
24. Stephen Ulmann, *The Principles of Semantics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), p. 120.

the refutation of Hegel is strategically placed at the very beginning of this monumental work so that the reader can be prepared to enter the intricate and enchanting world of comparisons East and West, and be guided in an exciting intellectual adventure that takes one beyond the limitations of one's myopic, monolingual, narrow-minded, self-centered, and self-enclosed parochialism, to a much expanded horizon and a wide scope of knowledge probably the reader has never experienced before.

Quite apart from the difficulty of the classical Chinese language in which Qian Zhongshu's two major scholarly works are written, another difficulty lies, particularly for a Western reader, in the very form of Qian's work. It is the traditional form of commentaries almost randomly put together without a particular logical order. These loosely connected fragments of insights embody a deeply personal conviction of the author that what matters is the detailed knowledge of ideas and things, rather than systematic structures and abstract theories. All philosophical systems will collapse eventually, Qian argues, and when they do, they will lose all their impressive structural complexity and organization, but bits and pieces of their original ideas may retain their value and validity, just like bricks and timbers may still be useful when huge buildings crumble to dust. "Remnant ideas that are dislodged from systems and nascent ideas that are not yet assembled into systems are all fragmented," says Qian. "It is therefore a shallow and vulgar view—if not an excuse for laziness and coarseness—to take notice only of big volumes and long treatises but look down upon terse expressions and pithy phrases, or to be so intoxicated by quantity as to discard a gram of seemingly insignificant words in favor of a ton of nonsense."[25] With such a suspicion of systems, Qian writes his commentaries not to systematically explicate the philosophical, literary, or some other aspect of ancient Chinese books, but always focused on specific points in particular words in a particular text, and always put them in comparison with concrete words in different texts Chinese and Western. His commentaries are mostly short entries ranging from a few lines to a few pages, with no apparent connections among them, and they always begin with textual details and proceed to develop freely, touching on any number of diverse realms of knowledge, such as philosophy, history, literature, psychology, philology, and so on. He always cites a wealth of materials in classical Chinese and several Western languages, weaving a rich intertextual tapestry of quotations that bear on one another in unexpected ways, making the idea under discussion clear and convincing, as it is illustrated by a wealth of examples and supported by a remarkable amount of textual evidence that reveals surprisingly enlightening connections. "To readers with a habitual urge for logical connections and clear boundaries of scholarly 'fields' or academic 'disciplines,'" as I said elsewhere, the short,

25. Qian Zhongshu, "Reading *Laokoon*," *Qi zhui ji* [*Collection of Seven Essays*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1985), p. 30. I have discussed Qian's suspicion of systems and its relation with his form of writing, see Zhang Longxi, "The Fragmented and the Systematic Ideas," *Zouchu wenhua de fengbi quan* [*Out of the Cultural Ghetto*], p. 208-19.

apparently fragmented commentaries in Qian's work "may appear overwhelmingly rich and waywardly exuberant. But once we surrender our usual expectation of a linear argument and let ourselves be guided by the seemingly erratic turns of a great mind, Qian's erudition, the dazzling brilliance of his insights, the apposite quotations, the revelation of deep affinities and connection of ideas in a wealth of texts, and the knowledge and wisdom released from ancient works through his commentaries will reward us with a special kind of pleasure, a deep sense of intellectual gratification." Indeed, Qian Zhongshu's works "represent the very best of Chinese scholarship in our time that will immensely improve our understanding of Chinese culture, and let readers appreciate the rich legacy of that culture not as something alien, exotic, and mysterious, but fully accessible in a rational discourse and the mutual illumination of the East and the West." [26] Fortunately, we now have at least a partial translation of Qian's major work, *Limited Views*, expertly rendered into English by Ronald Egan and published by Harvard.[27]

The short fragments of commentaries in Qian's work, however, are not without their order and connection, after all. I have put together Qian's commentaries on the *Laozi*, or the famous *Tao de ching*, to show his major points on this important book of Taoist philosophy. To showcase just one aspect of those commentaries, allow me to point to his commentary on the one phrase in chapter 40 of the *Laozi*: "Turning back (*fan* 反) is the way the Dao moves." Here the word "turn back" or *fan*, says Qian, is a case of bisemy with opposite meanings, just like Hegel's favorite *aufheben*, for "the first is the *fan* as in *zheng fan* 正反 (positive and negative), that is, negation; the second is the *fan* as in *wang fan* 往反 (go out and come back), that is, return."[28] According to Qian, the best description of the way the Dao moves is Laozi's remarks in chapter 25: "I would constrainedly name it 'Great'. Being great, it is said to vanish. Vanishing, it is said to move far away. Being far away, it is said to return." Comparing this movement of the Dao with the syllogistic movement of opposites in Hegel's dialectics, Qian says:

> "Great" is the positive (*zheng*); to "vanish" is to depart from it, to run counter to Great in self-alienation, and that is the negation. "To move far away" is the end result of departure, the extreme of negation, and it is said to "return" because moving far away will reverse the course, that is, the negation of the negation (*dé-négation*), and the "ultimate conformity" (*zhishun* 至順) will "harmonize" (*he* 合) with the positive. Therefore, the word *fan* means both countering (*weifan* 違反) in its negative sense, and return (*huifan* 回反) in its positive sense. What Hegel calls "the negation of the negation" (*Das zweite Negative, das Negative des Negation, ist jenes Aufheben des Widerspruchs*) characterizes the same principle.

26. Zhang Longxi, "Qian Zhongshu on Philosophical and Mystical Paradoxes in the *Laozi*," in Mark Csikszentmihaly and Philip J. Ivanhoe (eds.), *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), p. 98.
27. See Qian Zhongshu, *Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters*, trans. Ronald Egan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998).
28. Qian Zhongshu, *Guan zhui bian* [*Limited Views*], 2:445.

Here we see Qian makes another jibe at Hegel's Eurocentric dismissal of the Chinese language and philosophy by showing how the Taoist philosopher has laconically expressed the same principle of dialectics and how Chinese words like *fan*, no less significant than Hegel's favorite term *Aufhebung*, also contains opposite meanings in the same name as both "counter" or "going against" and "return" or "coming back." Qian Zhongshu thus continues to argue that Laozi's concise expression adumbrated what in Hegel was to develop into an elaborate system of philosophical discourse:

> The word *fan* in "Turning back is the way the Dao moves" thus means both "negation" and "return" or "the negation of negation," and the phrase contains both sides of the movement: to move against the positive, and also to move against negation and harmonize with the positive. It is my humble opinion that among all our ancient writings, these five characters from the *Laozi* epitomizes the principles of dialectics . . . Hegel remarks that contradiction is the root of all movement and liveliness (*die Wurzel aller Bewugung und Lebendigkeit*), that dialectics can be conceived of as a circle that winds up in itself (*als einen in sich geschlungen Kreis*), that its moving forward (*ein Vorwärts*) is also moving backward (*ein Rückwarts*), and that the true (*das Wahre*) manifests itself in an opposite doubling (*die entgegensetzende Verdopplung*); he also describes the process of thinking as a circle that turns back to itself (*ein Kreis, der in sich zurückgeht*). All his hundreds of words are nothing but the unfolding and expansion of what is meant by the one phrase in the *Laozi*.[29]

Of course, Qian Zhongshu is not saying that systematic theorizing has little or no value, for he is himself a voracious reader of major Western works of philosophical systems, and his familiarity with them indicates that he not only pays attention to these systematic works, but also holds them in high regard. There are obvious differences in the expression of ideas in systematic or epigrammatic forms between China and the West. From Plato and Aristotle to Vico, Kant, Hegel, and contemporary philosophers, Western philosophy often manifests itself in a systematic discourse and is written down in huge volumes, but in China, great thinkers like Confucius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, and numerous others throughout the centuries did not construct theoretical systems, and much of their ideas and insights are found in pithy expressions, in fragmented commentaries, even in short poetic lines or observations in notes. The point is that the quality of writing and the insight contained in a particular idea have little to do with the form of expression, be it systematic or otherwise. We cannot dismiss the value of systems, and we certainly should not give up reading voluminous works under the pretence of considering only concrete, fragmented ideas, but Qian's emphasis on concrete, textual units of ideas and insights is important, and it is in the weaving of dif-

29. *Ibid.*, p. 446. Qian gives references to Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Reclams "Universal-Bibliothek," III, 365; II, 80; III, 373, 375; *Aesthetik*, Aufbau, 69; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 20; *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Felix Meiner, I, 118, cf. 109.

ferent texts from China and the West, in the concrete words and phrases put together in an intertextual and cross-cultural dialogue, that Qian Zhongshu sets up an excellent example for East-West comparative studies.

Other than the two works written in classical Chinese, Qian Zhongshu has also a collection of critical essays written in the modern vernacular with lots of quotations in classical Chinese as well as in several European languages, which make more sustained arguments on a number of important themes in comparative studies. *Qi zhui ji* or *A Collection of Seven Essays* was published in 1984 and represents some of the best work in modern Chinese scholarship. The first essay in that collection deals with Chinese painting and Chinese poetry, with an emphasis on the difference in the criteria or standards for evaluating painting and poetry in traditional Chinese criticism. This becomes a significant issue because there have been critical opinions in China that regard painting as "poetry with shape" and poetry as "shapeless painting," or painting as "voiceless poetry" and poetry as "speaking picture." Qian immediately brings this into comparison with similar Western views: "Simonides of Cleos has long held that 'painting is speechless poetry, while poetry is painting with a voice.' The fourth example of *commutatio* in a book on rhetoric attributed to Cicero states that 'just as a poem is a speaking picture, a picture should be a silent poem' (*Item poema loquens pictura, pictura tacitum poema debet esse*). Da Vinci puts it directly when he says that painting is 'a mute poem' (*una poesia muta*), while poetry is 'a blind picture' (*una pittura cieca*)."[30] That is exactly the traditional view Gotthold Lessing tried to refute in his famous work *Laokoon*. "The idea that poetry and painting are sister arts forms a cornerstone of ancient Western theories of the arts," says Qian, "but that is also the stumbling block Lessing wanted to remove, for in his view, poetry and painting have their own features and appearances, and they are 'no jealous sisters' (*keine eifersüchtige Schwester*)."[31] The task Qian sets up for his essay is to examine whether this popular view in both China and the West can stand the test of critical practice.

"In the history of Chinese painting," Qian Zhongshu argues, "the Southern School of painting is most representative and the most important." He then goes on to quote the Ming dynasty writer and calligrapher Dong Qichang (1555-1636), who observes that "Chan Buddhism has the Southern and the Northern Schools, which started to diverge during the period of Tang. The Southern and the Northern Schools of painting also diverged during the Tang, but they are not divided by the painters' provenances in the south or the north."[32] Qian points out that such division of regional manners or styles related to the south or the north is an old tradition that can be traced back not just to the Tang in the eighth and the ninth centuries, not even to the Six Dynasties in the fourth and the fifth centuries, but much earlier, already

30. Qian Zhongshu, "Chinese Poetry and Chinese Painting," *Qi zhui ji* [*Collection of Seven Essays*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1985), p. 5.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

existent in the pre-Qin antiquity. "In fact, in the 'Doctrine of the Mean' section of *Li ji* or the *Record of Rites*, it is said that 'the strong in the south' was tolerant and peaceful, 'not seeking revenge of the unjust,' which was quite different from 'the strong in the north' that loved to fight, 'not abhorring even death.' That already differentiated moderation and impetuosity as characteristic of the 'south' and the 'north.'" But that is not just a Chinese habit, but can be found in the West as well. "Pascal divided two kinds of spirits (*deux sortes d'esprit*): one 'strong and narrow,' the other 'broad and weak' (*l'esprit pouvant être fort et étroit, et pouvant être ample et faible*). In his analysis of rationality, Kant identified two basic tendencies, of which one takes interest in multiplicity on the principle of specification (*das Interesse der Mannigfaltigkeit, nach dem Princip der Specification*), while the other takes interest in unity on the principle of aggregation (*das Interesse der Einheit, nach dem Princip der Aggregation*). The differentiation of the Southern and the Northern Schools in Chan Buddhism may be said to be a manifestation of the two kinds of spirits or the two tendencies of rationality in Buddhist thought."[33] The two tendencies may coexist, but in the tradition of Chinese painting, the Southern School started with Wang Wei (699-759) gradually became the mainstream and the orthodoxy, whereas in the tradition of Chinese poetry, those poets whose style was close to Wang Wei's and the Southern School of painting never occupied high positions in the mainstream or the orthodoxy. Wang Wei happens to be also a famous poet, but, as Qian comments, "Wang Wei is certainly a major poet; his poetry and his painting can be said 'to have the same interest, though expressed in different forms,' and he has secured the place to occupy the first chair in the tradition of old painting. And yet, when it comes to ranking in the tradition of old poetry, the first chair is not to be assigned to Wang Wei. Ever since the mid-Tang, the greatest poet revered by all has always been Du Fu. To borrow Croce's words, Wang Wei in comparison with Du Fu can only be counted as 'a small-great poet' (*un piccolo-grande poeta*), while his confederate can be called a 'great-small poet' (*un grande-piccolo poeta*)."[34] In summing up, Qian argues that "the position generally accorded the Spiritual Resonance School in the tradition of Chinese poetry is not the same generally acknowledged to be occupied by the Southern School in the tradition of Chinese painting, for traditional literary criticism refused to acknowledge the Spiritual Resonance School as representing the standard poetic style, while traditional art criticism recognized the Southern School as representing the standard painting style. So on the issue of 'mainstream' and 'orthodoxy,' traditional Chinese poetry and painting are not governed by the 'same rule.'"[35] That is to say, in traditional Chinese criticism, poetry and painting do not share the same criteria or standard despite the often-heard opinions to the contrary.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 9-10.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 18-19.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

What is important for our appreciation of world literature is Qian's reference to many works in the Western tradition that help illuminate the discussion of traditional Chinese poetry and painting. In the second essay in the collection, he continues to explore the relationship between poetry and plastic arts through his critical reading of Lessing's *Laokoon*. Qian begins by explicating his view that critical insights are sometimes expressed in fragments and quick glimpses of the essential rather than systematic discourse on the obvious, so we should not "discard a gram of seemingly insignificant words in favor of a ton of nonsense." He substantiates this point by referring to Diderot's much discussed *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, in which the "paradox" lies in Diderot's argument that "actors must keep calm in order to represent the characters and their strong emotions convincingly, it is the lack of emotions inside that makes the best of actors to act out passions (*c'est le manque absolu de sensibilité qui prépare les acteurs sublimes*); thus to represent a character's fury realistically (*jouer bien la fureur*), the actor himself should not be really furious (*être furieux*)." In eighteenth-century Europe, Qian continues to say, "Diderot was not the only one who held such a view, and Don Quixote had already adumbrated the idea when he said that 'the most clever character in a comedy (*la más discreta*) is the foolish clown (*el bobo*), for the one playing the fool is definitely not a simpleton (*es simple*)." Qian then turns to Chinese sources and says:

> The wisdom of the Chinese populace in ancient time also realized this and gave it a concise expression: "First learn how not to feel before you learn how to act in a play." Diderot's theory makes us look back at this old Chinese saying with respect and realize how profound its meaning is; at the same time, this old Chinese saying also seems to send its support to Diderot from millions of miles away and makes us realize that his theoretical argument is not just a foreigner's prejudice or casuistry. Such looking back in a new perspective is the crucial turning point in the process of understanding that Hegel has repeatedly talked about, namely, turning from "perceiving" (*bekannt*) to "knowing" (*erkannt*), from old acquaintance to real understanding. I dare say that as a theoretical discovery, that popular Chinese saying is not inferior to Diderot's argument.[36]

To find theoretical discoveries and insights in unexpected connections of Chinese and European texts is the basic way Qian Zhongshu makes his argument. There are numerous examples of such unexpected connections in his reading of *Laokoon*, but let me mention here just a few. The ancient Chinese realized a major point Lessing made in his book that poetry as a temporal art can depict actions in a sequence, which painting as a spatial art cannot do. An old record from the Tang has it that a man showed Wang Wei a painting of a group of music players, Wang said, "this is the scene of playing the first bit of the third section of the *Rainbow Robe Song*." At first the man did not believe him, but later he was convinced when he asked musicians to play the song

36. Qian Zhongshu, "Reading *Laokoon*," *ibid.*, p. 30.

and matched the scene with the painting. In the eleventh century, Shen Kuo (1031 – 1095), one of ancient China's best scientific minds, debunked this old legend as totally absurd, "made up by those who loved unusual curiosities, for in painting music performance, one can only paint one sound." Qian comments that "we can see from that simple phrase that he had realized that spatial art was constrained to depict the scene of only one particular moment."[37] Another memorable example is a painter's realization of the difficulty of representing temporal movement. A poem by Ji Kang (223-263) has these lines: "My eyes send off the flying geese, / And my hand swipes at the five strings." When the famous painter Gu Kaizhi (344-405) heard this, he acknowledged that "it is easy to paint 'my hand swipes at the five strings,' but it is difficult to paint 'my eyes send off the flying geese.'" The difficulty Gu Kaizhi felt, says Qian, can be understood in the light of Lessing's theory. "The scene of 'eyes sending off the flying geese' is quite different from 'eyes looking at the flying geese,' for it is not an instantaneous scene, but a progressive continuing action. 'sending off' and 'flying' back to their nest indicate that the geese are flying to their destination, gradually getting closer and closer, while the man following their flight and watching, gradually getting farther and farther away. Here we do have a problem of temporal sequence Lessing spoke of."[38] That is to say, in those seemingly simple fragments we can see that the ancient Chinese understood very well the distinction between poetry as temporal art and painting as spatial art, which Lessing discussed in *Laokoon*.

Lessing did not provide an exhaustive discussion, however, because there are many other things the ancient Chinese knew as difficult to paint, many images, subtle emotions and feelings described in Chinese poetry that are impossible to depict in plastic arts, "such as the sense of smell ('fragrance'), of touch ('moist', 'chilly'), of hearing ('choked sound of sobbing', 'the bell ringing'), and inner psychological conditions ('missing one's home') that are, unlike sorrow, joy, anger, or worries, not easily expressed outwardly; all these are 'difficult to paint' or 'cannot be depicted,' but it is not just a problem of time and space."[39] Moreover, Qian goes on to argue, colors in poetry can be literal depiction of colors or symbolic suggestions, and sometimes they are not possible for pictorial representation. Poets can combine darkness and light together, as Li Ho wrote: "The will-o'-the-wisp shines black on the pine leaves," or Xu Lan described the same as "There's other fire pitch-black, / Hidden in the valley with ghostly whispers." Qian then turns to Western poetry and quotes Milton and others, for Milton describes the phosphorus burning in the hell as "no light but rather darkness visible," and he also spoke of Satan as shooting a "black fire" at heaven. Victor Hugo described "a terrible black sun lit up the night" (*Un affreux soleil noir d'où rayonne la nuit*). All these are difficult to represent pictorially. Indeed, as Qian

37. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 33-34.

Zhongshu remarks, "a rather common metaphor is hard enough to represent in a painting, but metaphor is precisely what literary language is especially good at."[40] Many poetic metaphors, such as comparing a mountain to a camel's hump, are all based on partial likeness, not total identity, and thus easy for the art of literature to describe, but very difficult or even impossible for a painter to represent. Lessing did not delve into these in any depth, so Qian Zhongshu broadens Lessing's insights by bringing many such examples from Chinese and European literatures.

The most important point Qian makes towards the end of his essay, however, is that Lessing had made a significant contribution to critical theory with his concept of the suggestive "moment" (*Augenblick*), which Hegel appropriated and many later theoreticians also accepted. "The richly pregnant moment," says Qian, "is a very useful concept."[41] Not only do painters and sculptors choose such a moment that leads to, but not quite reaches, the climax, thus containing the possibilities of what is still unfolding, but poets and storytellers also make use of such a device. "Narratives in verse or prose are continuous and unfolding, capable of representing the entire 'action' completely from beginning to end, without the limitation of paintings that can only represent the scene of a single moment," Qian argues. "And yet, sometimes they choose to appear in bits and pieces, and end at a point close to the climax, leaving the rest to the reader to imagine. In other words, the principle of 'the pregnant moment' can also be used in the art of letters."[42] Qian draws many examples from Chinese and Western literatures that make ingenious use of Lessing's concept of *Augenblick*, and in traditional Chinese criticism, he particularly singles out Jin Shengtan (1610-1661) for "putting the greatest emphasis on this narrative method." He then quotes Jin Shengtan on the writing of narratives: "The art of writing consists in looking at this point without writing about it directly, but rather, leading to this from far away. After some twists and turns, at the point of getting close to this, stop again. Repeat several times, always start from somewhere far away, make twists and turns, and stop when it gets near, never write about what is being looked at directly, but let the reader catch a glimpse of it himself outside the text."[43] Jin Shengtan was indeed very close to Lessing's idea without knowing Lessing or any other European critical work, and he discussed novels and plays rather than painting and sculpture. And yet, as Qian remarks, "his commentaries enable us to realize that 'the pregnant moment' can be useful not only for the ending of short stories, but also for the chapter transitions in novels. The conventional formula in episodic novels, the common phrase that 'if you want to know what happens later, you have to listen to our continuation in the next chapter,' purports to keep the reader interested and not let his attention slacken off."[44] That is to say, when the narrative is about

40. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

to reach its climax, the author suddenly stops there, leaving the reader filled with expectations and anticipations, eager to read on. Not just Chinese episodic novels use this trick, but Qian draws examples and critical comments from George Sand, Alfred de Vigny, Otto Ludwig, to Ludovico Ariosto and Corneille, and come to the conclusion through such cross-cultural comparison. "Though Lessing spoke of the 'pregnant moment' with regard to plastic arts, he unintentionally offered a useful concept for the art of letters."[45] Thus Qian singles out the most brilliant idea and insight in Lessing's Laokoon, and helps us better understand this important concept equally useful in painting, sculpture, and literature.

Two other pieces in the *Collection of Seven Essays*, "Synæsthesia" and "Our Sweetest Songs," are thematic studies on a critical concept or idea, richly illustrated by works from different traditions. "Synaesthesia" begins with a discussion of several comments on the famous line from a poem by Song Qi (998-1061): "On the branch of a red apricot tree, spring is clamorous." By quoting from many texts, Qian shows that the word "clamorous" is often used in the works of Song dynasty poets. "The word 'clamorous,'" says Qian, "describes the condition of things that is soundless as if it were a waving motion with sound, thereby giving what is seen a sense of what is heard."[46] There are examples in the West as well, as Qian says, "Western languages use words meaning 'crying loud' or 'making a bang' (*loud, criard, chiassoso, chillón, knall*) to portray too bright or too strong colors, while light colors are said to be 'deaf' (*la teinte sourde*); aren't these helpful in understanding the word 'clamorous' in ancient Chinese poetry? In psychological or linguistic terms, these are all examples of 'synaesthesia' or 'empathy.'"[47] It is characteristic of Qian Zhongshu's writings to have a wealth of textual examples from China and the West to help mutual explication. From a rich pool of quotations in different languages, he brings us to see that 'synaesthesia' exists everywhere and is used widely in various languages. From daily language to poetic diction, from Aristotle to ancient Chinese classics, from Homer to Ezra Pound, from Western mysticism to Chinese Taoism and Buddhism, the many examples Qian draws make us to realize that synaesthesia and empathy are ubiquitous, something we can easily notice if we have the mind and the sensibility. But just as Qian points out, such a commonly seen device in Chinese poetry and prose "seems to have escaped understanding and recognition by ancient critics and rhetoricians."[48] In the West, "though Aristotle mentioned synaesthesia in *De Anima*, he never touched on it in his *Rhetoric*."[49] Once synaesthesia is put forward as a critical concept for discussion, however, Qian is able to reveal its ubiquity and usefulness in literature and art, and give us a much deeper understanding of its significance.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
46. Qian Zhongshu, "Synaesthesia," *ibid.*, p. 55.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 55-56.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Likewise, as a literary theme, "poetry can give vent to grievances" never received the attention it deserves in traditional critical theories. In the *Analects*, Confucius specified four functions for poetry—that poetry can be used to inspire, to observe social conditions, to form a sense of community, and to give vent to grievances—of which the last is only one of the four functions. But by quoting many examples from Chinese and Western literary texts, Qian Zhongshu proves that the idea that "poetry can give vent to grievances" is a universally effective principle, namely, that the most effective and moving works of literature are produced from sorrow and miseries, while works writing about sorrow and miseries are also most powerful in moving and affecting readers. "Pain can give rise to poetry better than pleasure, and good poems mainly express unhappy, sorrowful or depressed feelings. In ancient China, this idea was not just a commonplace in critical theory on poetry, but became a convention in the practice of writing."[50] Of the numerous rich examples, let me just pick up a particularly impressive one. The fifth-century Chinese critic Liu Xie (465? – 522) argues in his famous work, *The Literary Mind or the Carving of Dragons*, that a great work of literature is often the product of the author's painful lived experience and sorrow, just "like pearls that come out of the disease of suffering oysters." That interesting metaphor is borrowed from an earlier work, *Huainan zi*, where it is said that "the pearl as bright as the moon is for the oyster a disease, though for us a benefit." Applied to literary creation, the metaphor perfectly conveys the idea that poetry gives vent to grievances. Interestingly, this metaphor is not just a Chinese one, but can be found in Western texts as well. Qian says:

> When Western writers talk about literature, their use of metaphor is remarkably coincidental with that of the Chinese. Franz Grillparzer remarks that poetry is like a pearl, the product of a sick and silent shellfish (*die Perle, das Erzeugnis des kranken stillen Muscheltieres*); Flaubert observes that a pearl is formed in the illness of the oyster (*la perle est une maladie de l'huître*), while the style of a writer flows out of a deeper sorrow (*l'écoulement d'une douleur plus profonde*). Heine wonders whether poetry is to man what the pearl is to the poor oyster, the stuff of illness that makes it suffer (*wie die Perle, die Krankheitsstoff, woran das arme Austertier leidet*). A. E. Housman maintains that poetry is a sort of "secretion; whether a natural secretion, like the turpentine in the fir, or a morbid secretion, like the pearl in the oyster." Apparently such a metaphor is found everywhere and used by all writers independently of one another, because it expresses precisely the idea that "poetry gives vent to grievances," and that it is "produced under the pressure of suffering or misfortune."[51]

Reading this passage, we cannot but marvel at the affinities of the poetic minds Chinese and Western, and we cannot but admire Qian Zhongshu's erudition and extraordinary memory that he was able to pinpoint exactly

50. Qian Zhongshu, "Our Sweetest Songs," *ibid.*, p. 102.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

where to look and collect the metaphors of "pearl in a suffering oyster" from different works in different languages, presented as textual evidence to support the universal applicability of the idea that "poetry can give vent to grievances." Once given a persuasive explication, the phrase from Liu Xie's *Literary Mind or the Carving of Dragons* and the poetic function identified in the Confucian *Analects* are combined to form a significant concept meaningful in both literary creation and literary criticism. Future critics can no longer neglect this important critical concept and insight, but need to explore its depth in the works of world literature. Qian Zhongshu's essay is always wide in scope and rich in details, it is always crossing over boundaries, "speaking of the Western and the modern, but wittingly or unwittingly moving far to China and antiquity," as he says in describing his own style.[52] Knowledge of the ancient and the modern, Chinese and Western, is in fact interconnected, and it is the task of comparative studies to go beyond disciplinary boundaries and to seek understanding and comprehension by working out these interconnections.

The seven essays in Qian's collection may be divided into three groups. The first two discuss the critical tradition in China and the West on painting and poetry, the next two propose important critical concepts, and the remaining three are concerned with literary translation and reception. The essays on Lin Shu's translation and on the translation of Longfellow's *Psalm of Life* not only discuss translation of literary works, but lead us into the historical world of the late imperial China to have a feel of the social milieu and intellectual ambience of the twilight years of the Qing dynasty. Lin Shu, as I mentioned in the beginning part of this essay, did not know any foreign language but produced very popular translations of more than 170 Western novels in collaboration with those who knew the originals. In such indirect translations, there are certainly mistakes and infelicities that provide stuff for a good laugh, and Qian does point out some of them to make the essay a delightfully humorous reading. He makes it clear, however, that not just Lin Shu's translation, but translation in general, is prone to such mistakes. "Westerners have this proverb: 'translators are traitors' (*Traduttore traditore*). Our Chinese ancestors also held that the *fan* (trans-) in *fanyi* (translation) is equivalent to the *fan* or 'turning' as in 'turning to the backside' when looking at an embroidered piece of silk, showing its backside: '*fan* (turn) is like to turn over a piece of brocade; there are flowers on both sides, but the flowers are all in reverse' (Monk Zanning [919-1002] on translating Buddhist sutras). This metaphor," says Qian, "reminds us of Don Quixote's remark that reading translation is like looking at Flemish tapestries from the reverse side (*es como quien mira los tapices flamencos por el revés*)." But translation also plays the role of match-making, it is, says Qian, "a go-between or liaison officer, introducing all to make acquaintance with foreign works, and entice us to fall in love with foreign texts, as if a match-maker, leading to a kind of 'literary marriage' between countries, the only 'marriage' between countries

52. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

with very little danger of turning against each other, quarrel, separation, and brawl."[53] At the time, however, that is, at the end of the last imperial dynasty of Qing and the beginning of the Republican period in China, old-fashioned *literati* had little understanding of the importance of translation and even doubted there was any literature in foreign countries. Qian Zhongshu depicts the intellectual climate at the time by telling a story of his own experience. In 1931 or 1932, he went to see Mr. Chen Yan, a famous poet and a respected senior scholar, and had a long conversation with him in Suzhou. Mr. Chen knew that he was studying abroad and could understand foreign languages, but thought he "must have been studying some practical subjects like science and engineering, or law and administration, or economics." What ensued in the conversation turned out to be rather interesting:

> On that day, he finally found out, and he said with a sigh: "for literature, why would you learn in a foreign country? Isn't it true that our Chinese literature is good enough?" I dared not to argue with him, but could only dodge behind his friend's name, so I said that reading novels translated by Lin Shu had got me interested in foreign literature. Mr. Chen said, "This is all messed up! If Qinnan [Lin Shu] knew this, he may not be pleased. Having read his translations, you should go further to study his classical style prose, how come you turned to look for foreign countries instead? Isn't Qinnan 'pushing fish to the deep waters'?"[54]

Here Qian Zhongshu attaches a long footnote to describe the prejudice against foreign literature among many old-fashioned men of letters at the time. "Many old generation of men of letters hold such a view," says Qian, "of which a poem by Fan Zengxiang (1846-1931) is exemplary: 'We have boundless learning in addition to classis and histories,/ What poetry there is to read among the Europeans?' They had to admit that China was behind the West in terms of science, but they made literature the basis of their sense of national superiority." But this is not just the prejudice among Chinese literati, for "it looks like men in other ancient Eastern countries also held similar views. Edmond de Goncourt reported that the Persians also questioned: 'the Europeans can make watches and all kinds of machines and are indeed quite clever, but the Persians are still superior; do the Europeans have writers and poets (*les Européens ont-ils des littérateurs, des poètes*)?" Even though Lin Shu did not think much of his own translation in comparison with his prose writings, he at least knew that there were foreign novels worthy of translation. So Qian praised Lin Shu and says, "on that point, Lin Shu's perception surpassed that of his more talented and learned contemporaries."[55] In his essay on the translation of Longfellow's *Psalm of Life*, Qian Zhongshu mentions Zhang Deyi (1847-1918), a top student graduated from the Interpreters' College set up by the Qing government in 1862, who later went to Europe several times

53. Qian Zhongshu, "On Lin Shu's Translation," *ibid.*, p. 68.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
55. *Ibid.*, note 60, p. 98.

on diplomatic missions. Though he was said to have an "excellent command of English," Zhang Deyi was quite ignorant of Western literature, mistaking *Gulliver's Travels* for factual records, thus completely missing the point of its social satire. At precisely the time when Zhang was traveling in England and writing down some naively imbecile comments on this famous work of English literature, says Qian, "Lin Shu, who knew not a single word of a foreign language and had never in his life gone abroad, and Wei Yi, who never graduated from any college, were translating *Gulliver's Travels*." Comparing Zhang's view on this book with Lin Shu's, says Qian, "I don't think it is difficult to judge who of the two had a better understanding of Western literature."[56]

When two cultures make the first encounter, translation, even invariably inadequate translation, constitutes the necessary step towards mutual understanding, a bridge across huge linguistic and cultural gaps. Thomas F. Wade (1818-1895), interpreter, diplomat, and the first holder of the Chair of Chinese at Cambridge University, once translated H. W. Longfellow's *A Psalm of Life* into Chinese, which was later polished by Dong Xun (1810-1892), minister in charge of foreign affairs in the late Qing government. Dong wrote the poem on a fan and entrusted it with Anson Burlingame (1820-1870), Envoy Extraordinary sent by the Qing government to the United States, who delivered it to Longfellow himself. Wade's Chinese was limited, and his translation was infelicitous, even at times incomprehensible; Dong Xun, on the other hand, did not know any foreign language and could only work with a half-intelligible translation and relying on his own guess and conjecture. Not surprisingly, the end result is quite unfaithful to the original. By analyzing the translation in detail, Qian Zhongshu shows how the linguistic problems reveal the lack of understanding between China and the West at the time, and how ignorant the Chinese then were concerning anything foreign.

Like the ancient Greeks, the ancient Chinese were culturally self-centered and regarded anyone unable to speak their language as barbarian, who supposedly shared the language with birds. Such a traditional view remained strong even in the late Qing period, and can be seen in a hilarious passage of the diary entry kept by a conservative-minded Weng Tonghe (1830-1904). Weng went to the office in charge of foreign affairs near a Chinese New Year's Day, and soon after, "upon seeing ambassadors of various countries coming for New Year greetings," he wrote, "I went to the western side to avoid the crowd and looked from afar at the main hall. About twenty or so people gathered there around the table, with whom Lord Zheng talked in the barbarian language, chirping from time to time." Lord Zheng or Zheng Jize (1839-1890) was a famous diplomat who was known to speak a fluent, if grammatically flawed, English. As Qian Zhongshu comments, it is a commonplace in old Chinese texts to describe the language of foreigners as the chirping of birds; therefore "to the ears of Weng Tonghe, who always ran to avoid rubbing shoulders with foreign ghosts, any foreign language, be it English or

56. Qian Zhongshu, "The First English Poem Translated into Chinese, *Psalm of Life*, and Several Related Matters," *op. cit.*, p. 135.

French, would all sound like endless chirping and twittering." [57] In the late nineteenth century, Chinese elites would still fall back on their unshakable sense of cultural superiority in spite of, or perhaps because of, China's defeat in the Opium Wars. "They all admitted that the West was more advanced in natural sciences and in some areas of social sciences, and that China should learn from it," says Qian in describing the general consensus among the late Qing elites; "but at the same time, insofar as literature and moral philosophy were concerned, ours were the best and there was no need to import these from foreign countries. Moreover, once foreigners realized the wonder and superiority of those things Chinese, they would probably 'come to us' for enlightenment."[58] That was indeed the mentality and attitude of most Chinese *literati* elites in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth, shortly before the last imperial dynasty was to collapse. At that time, Chinese elites only had very vague ideas about foreign countries and knew precious little about foreign affairs; very few of them had any knowledge of a foreign language, let alone engaging in anything like translation of foreign literature.

Under such circumstances and in such an intellectual climate, it is quite unusual for Longfellow's *A Psalm of Life* to appear in a Chinese translation. The translated poem was written on a Chinese fan and brought to America by Anson Burlingame, presented to Longfellow himself, which the poet recorded in his diary, but only said it was sent as a gift from "a Chinese mandarin" without mentioning the translator's name. One of Longfellow's biographers later wrote that the "mandarin" was a certain "Jung Tagen," which Qian Zhongshu was able to establish, after careful scrutiny, that it should have been "Tung Tajen" or *Dong daren*, namely, His Excellency Lord Dong. The official Lord Dong must have been Dong Xun, who was Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, but was the poem written by Dong Xun the same as written on the fan, which Longfellow mentioned in his diary? "It should be easy to find the answer," Qian Zhongshu wrote in 1981, "by anyone who has the opportunity to visit the United States and also has the interest to examine things left by Longfellow."[59] In the 1990s, that Chinese fan reappeared in the Longfellow House in Cambridge, Mass., and it turned out exactly as Qian had anticipated, a fan with Longfellow's *A Psalm of Life* written in Chinese in graceful calligraphy, dated spring 1865 with the signature of none other than Lord Dong Xun. Therefore, fortunately in the future, "anyone who has the opportunity to visit the United States and also has the interest to examine things left by Longfellow" would be able to look at that legendary fan, an object that has an interesting story inscribed in it as a testimony to the literary encounter between China and the West. The connection of ideas and themes through translation and comparative study is what Qian discusses and does best in his scholarship. His extraordinary erudition and wide scope of knowledge, and his example as a scholar, are always

57. This is Weng's diary entry for the 10th day of the first month, the 13th year of Guangxu (1887); quoted *ibid.*, p. 122.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

encouraging and most inspiring. Qian Zhongshu has a low opinion of those who pride themselves of being experts and specialists, because, he says:

> Objects of humanistic studies are connected with one another and can mutually illuminate, not only crossing boundaries of nations and time periods, but running through different fields and disciplines. Because of the severe limitations of our lives and intellect, we can only reduce our research areas in increasingly narrower circles and divide our specialties into increasingly smaller subfields. That is for the sake of convenience and we have no other choice. Therefore, to become a specialist in a particular field, even though subjectively one may feel proud of it, is objectively something one cannot help but have to live with[60].

That grand vision of always transcending the limitations of a "special field" to achieve a more inclusive and broad horizon is essential for humanistic studies, as it is an appropriate guidance for the study of world literature. It is difficult to emulate the kind of encyclopedic knowledge we find in Qian Zhongshu's works, but that can be a goal for anyone devoted to a global perspective to aim at and try to achieve.

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60. Qian Zhongshu, "Our Sweetest Songs," *ibid.*, p. 113.